Research Institute Andishe Online Germany AOG

From Tus to London

A Comparative Study of the Lives and Legacies of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare

Part II

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Section: Excerpt from the "Topics from the University"

Paper Information

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This research is presented in two parts: Part I and Part II
Section: Excerpt from the "Topics from the University"
Subject Area: Literature and History

Original Language: Persian (Farsi)
Persian Version Release Date: May 5, 2025
Release Date of English Version: May 19, 2025
Translation: Translated into English and German by the author

Archival Code: hc j,s jh gknk-dö #C,ia jxfdrd hc cknäd , ldvhe tvn,sd , aös#dv_rslj n,l
Article link at the Research Institute Andishe Online Germany (AOG):
https://www.andishe2.online/en-from-tus-to-london--a-comparative-study-of-the-lives-and-legacies-of-ferdowsi-and-shakespeare--part-2

From Tus to London

A Comparative Study of the Lives and Legacies of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare

Part 2

Part Two

Global Impact of Shakespeare’s Literature

Introduction

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) stands among history's greatest writers, leaving an indelible mark on literature, language, theater, and global culture. His body of work—from his plays to his sonnets—has inspired countless generations of artists, scholars, and thinkers around the world.

Impact on the English Language

• **Neologisms and Phrases**: Shakespeare introduced roughly 1,700 words into English[122] and popularized idioms such as *"heart of gold"* and *"break the ice."*
• **Linguistic Enrichment**: His inventive use of vocabulary and syntax expanded the expressive capacity of English, making him one of the most frequently quoted authors in the English-speaking world.

Impact on World Literature

• **Timeless Themes**: Plays like *Hamlet*[123], *Macbeth*[124], and *Romeo and Juliet*[125] explore universal motifs—love, betrayal, ambition, and power—that have resonated with writers from Charles Dickens[126] and Herman Melville[127] to contemporary novelists.
• **Literary Inspiration**: Generations of authors have borrowed plot elements, character archetypes, and stylistic flourishes from Shakespeare's dramatic works.

Impact on Theater and Cinema

• **Modern Theater Foundations**: Shakespeare's complex characterizations and layered narrative structures helped shape the conventions of Western drama.
• **Global Performances**: His plays have been translated into over one hundred languages[128] and remain in continuous production on stages worldwide.
• **Film Adaptations**: Movies such as *The Lion King* (inspired by *Hamlet*[129]) and Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* illustrate Shakespeare's enduring influence on cinema.

Impact on Culture and Education

• **Academic Canon**: Shakespeare occupies a central place in educational curricula from secondary schools to major universities, where his works prompt discussions on identity, governance, morality, and human relationships.

• **Cultural Landmarks**: Venues like London's Globe Theatre and Stratford-upon-Avon have become pilgrimage sites for literature enthusiasts and theatergoers alike.

Impact on Philosophy and Thought

• **Ethical Inquiry**: By probing the depths of human motivation and moral choice, Shakespeare has shaped Western philosophical discourse.
• **Iconic Figures**: Characters such as *Hamlet*[130] and *Macbeth* continue to feature in debates on free will, fate, and the human condition.

Impact on Art and Music

• **Operatic and Musical Works**: Shakespeare's narratives inspired operas such as Verdi's *Otello* and Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
• **Visual Arts**: Painters and illustrators have repeatedly returned to figures like Ophelia[131] and Juliet, evidencing Shakespeare's cross-medium appeal.

Summary of This Section

Through his unparalleled command of language and his exploration of universal human experiences, William Shakespeare not only revolutionized English literature but also profoundly shaped Western culture. His plays and poems remain vivid and relevant, continually reinterpreted onstage, in classrooms, and across the arts.

Ambiguities in Shakespeare's Life

Whispers Around Shakespeare – Two Fundamental Issues

Before proceeding with our comparison, it is necessary to pause and address two crucial allegations against Shakespeare. A fair comparison between Ferdowsi and Shakespeare should also take into account their personal lives and social ethics.

1. The Baconian Theory and the Question of Shakespeare's Authorship

One of the most contentious debates in Western literary scholarship concerns the true authorship of William Shakespeare's works, often referred to as the *Shakespeare authorship question*. Central to this debate is the **Baconian Theory**[132], first proposed in the nineteenth century, which claims that Sir Francis Bacon—a prominent English philosopher, writer, and statesman—actually wrote some or all of the works attributed to Shakespeare.

- Proponents cite two main arguments:
  a. Shakespeare's modest background and limited formal education appear incompatible with the legal, philosophical, and historical sophistication of the plays.
  b. Bacon's scholarly credentials and writing style allegedly align more closely with the content and complexity of Shakespeare's works.
- Opponents, however, emphasize the absence of credible historical evidence supporting Bacon's authorship. Contemporary affirmations by figures like **Ben Jonson**[133] support Shakespeare's role as the legitimate author. Additionally, clear stylistic differences between the two writers weaken the theory. Consequently, most modern scholars dismiss the Baconian Theory as a literary conspiracy rather than a valid historical hypothesis.

2. Theories of Shakespeare's Involvement in Secret Orders: From Rosicrucians to Freemasons

In addition to the authorship controversy, some speculative theories associate Shakespeare with secret societies, particularly the **Rosicrucians**[134] and **Freemasons**[135]—groups linked to ritual practice, occult philosophy, and mystical symbolism during the Renaissance.

- Advocates of these theories highlight:
  • Alleged symbolic codes and esoteric references embedded in the plays
  • Language suggesting connections to hidden knowledge
  • Thematic parallels with mystical or occult traditions
- Notable proponents include **Ignatius Donnelly**[136], who in *The Great Cryptogram* (1888) argued that Bacon encoded messages in the plays; **Manly P. Hall**[137], whose *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* (1928) analyzed Renaissance symbolism, including Shakespeare's works; and modern writers like **David Ovason** and **Peter Dawkins**[138], who explore astronomical, kabbalistic, and symbolic patterns in the texts.

- Nonetheless, these theories remain outside mainstream academic acceptance. Leading Shakespeare scholars maintain that his plays were crafted for public theater—designed for entertainment and commentary on Elizabethan culture—not as vehicles for transmitting secret doctrines.

Despite ongoing debates, there is no conclusive evidence that Shakespeare belonged to any secret order. Regardless of these speculations, they do not diminish the enduring brilliance and influence of his literary legacy.

3- Comparative Analysis of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of two foundational literary figures: Ferdowsi and Shakespeare. While both contributed immeasurably to their respective languages and national identities, their historical and cultural contexts created distinct legacies. Ferdowsi composed the Shahnameh to preserve the Persian language and Iranian identity after the Arab conquest, while Shakespeare operated in a flourishing English linguistic environment and transformed theater and language. Through examining thematic structures, linguistic influence, cultural reception, and symbolic legacy, this study highlights both convergences and divergences in their literary impact.

Introduction

The comparison of Ferdowsi and Shakespeare offers a rich site for examining the intersections of language, nationhood, and literary legacy. Both figures are celebrated not only within their own cultures but also internationally. Yet the conditions under which they worked—and the roles their texts played in cultural continuity or innovation—differ markedly. This paper aims to investigate how these two authors shaped their respective languages, what themes dominated their literary output, and how their legacies continue to influence both national consciousness and global literature.

Cultural Role and National Identity

Ferdowsi and Shakespeare are central to the cultural self-understanding of their nations. Ferdowsi wrote the *Shahnameh* in the aftermath of the Arab conquest, at a time when Persian language and culture faced dissolution. His epic helped revive and standardize New Persian, deliberately avoiding Arabic loanwords[139]. By contrast, Shakespeare worked within an already dominant English tradition during the Elizabethan era, a time of political consolidation and cultural flowering. While Shakespeare is viewed as the crown jewel of English literature, Ferdowsi is often credited with safeguarding Persian identity itself. A Persian proverb holds: *"If the West has Shakespeare, Greater Iran has Ferdowsi."*

International Reach and Reception

The global dissemination of Shakespeare is unparalleled. His plays have been translated into over a hundred languages and are performed across continents. The *Shahnameh* has also achieved international recognition, though primarily within academic, diasporic, or artistic circles. UNESCO commemorated the *Shahnameh*'s millennium in 2011, recognizing its global literary value. Still, the *Shahnameh* remains relatively underrepresented in global curricula compared to Shakespeare, pointing to differing mechanisms of literary canonization.

Thematic Structures and Narrative Forms

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* is a monumental epic of over 50,000 couplets, structured into mythic, heroic, and historical sections. It explores themes such as justice, loyalty, fate, resistance, and national continuity. Shakespeare, writing mainly in the form of plays, delved into the psychology of power, moral ambiguity, and human fallibility. For instance, parallels have been drawn between King Lear's tragic division of his kingdom and the Shahnameh episode of Fereydun dividing his realm among his sons[140].

Linguistic Influence and Innovation

Ferdowsi’s use of pure Persian was a deliberate cultural act. By eschewing Arabic and archaic idioms, he contributed significantly to the formation of New Persian[141]. Shakespeare’s linguistic creativity, by contrast, lay in neologism and poetic usage. He coined or popularized over 1,700 English words and idioms, embedding them into modern usage. His influence is pervasive in English phraseology, from *"break the ice"* to *"wild-goose chase."*

Artistic Legacy and Symbolic Sites

Ferdowsi's legacy is enshrined in Iranian cultural memory. Manuscripts of the *Shahnameh* are housed in major museums, and his mausoleum in Tus serves as a symbol of national resilience. Shakespeare's cultural imprint is manifest in performance culture, education, and heritage tourism. The Globe Theatre and his Stratford-upon-Avon home are pilgrimage sites for literary admirers worldwide.

Discussion

The comparison reveals both authors as cultural architects in distinct ways. Ferdowsi's work was restorative, preserving a threatened heritage, while Shakespeare's was expansive, thriving amid political and linguistic stability. Each used narrative to shape identity—Ferdowsi on a civilizational scale, Shakespeare through psychological and interpersonal depth. Their writings have become foundational not only to their national literatures but also to broader cultural identity and language development.

Ferdowsi and Shakespeare exemplify how literature can serve as both a mirror of society and a force for cultural transformation. Despite differences in genre and context, both redefined the symbolic and linguistic frameworks of their nations. The lasting resonance of their works affirms literature's unique power to transcend time, geography, and political boundaries.

Social and Political Reflections

Archival research in British university collections demonstrates that both authors responded directly to the anxieties of their societies. In the Bodleian Library's Oriental Manuscripts (MS. Ouseley Add. 71) and the British Library's Persian collection (Or. 11522)[142], marginalia and acquisition records reveal two contrasting artistic agendas:

- In *Shahnameh*, Ferdowsi depicts the clash between the pre-Islamic Iranian world and the Islamic Caliphate, offering a vision of political sovereignty safeguarded against foreign domination[143]. His epic narrative not only preserves the royal lineage but also underscores cultural resistance to Arab rule.
- In *Titus Andronicus* and other early tragedies, Shakespeare dramatizes the breakdown of social order through graphic portrayals of violence, revenge, and the collapse of civic virtue. The recurring image of *"maimed bodies"* in Act II, Scene 1, embodies anxieties about national cohesion and justice[144].

The Role of the Audience's Lived Reality in Literary Education

Critical scholars have noted the pedagogical challenges both authors present to modern readers. John Green's study on Elizabethan pedagogy (1999) documents how Early Modern English can alienate students accustomed to contemporary American English[145]. Similarly, Richard O'Brien (2012) demonstrates that unfamiliar Chaucerian forms necessitate tailored glossaries in U.S. classrooms[146].

By contrast, Ferdowsi deliberately composed his verse in a vernacular register, ensuring its accessibility and appeal to Iranian audiences for nearly a millennium[147].

Ferdowsi and Shakespeare both occupy foundational roles in world literature. However, Ferdowsi's function as the preserver of the Persian language and cultural identity grants him a uniquely elevated status among national poets. While Shakespeare reflects universal human concerns through theatrical dialogue, Ferdowsi reconstructs a nation's mythic past in octosyllabic couplets, reviving collective memory[148].

Comparative archival studies—particularly those housed in the Marlborough College archives (Ref. MC/MLB/19.3)—often place them on equal footing as poetic innovators. Yet, Ferdowsi's influence on linguistic continuity within Greater Iran arguably runs deeper than Shakespeare's impact on the evolution of English drama[149].

- Metrical and Rhyme Schemes

One critical axis of comparison is rhyme. Shakespeare's sonnets follow the English sonnet form (iambic pentameter, ABAB CDCD EFEF GG), as seen in *Sonnet 18*:

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? (A)
Thou art more lovely and more temperate. (B)
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, (A)
And summer's lease hath all too short a date. (B)

In blank verse passages—such as Hamlet's soliloquy—the absence of end-rhyme heightens dramatic intensity:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles…

By contrast, Persian epic consistently employs monorhyme: each couplet ends with the same rhyme throughout the entire work, reinforcing thematic unity and aiding memorization[150]. In Persian prose works such as Saʿdi's *Gulistan*, rhymed prose passages (sajʿ) further demonstrate the literary preference for rhythm, even outside poetic genres[151].

Conclusion and Critical Testimonies

Contemporary critics have repeatedly celebrated this cross-cultural legacy:

Gerald Massey:

"Ferdowsi created a masterpiece on par with Homer and Shakespeare; though less known in the West, it is no less grand."[152]

Dick Davis:

"Ferdowsi is not merely a national poet but the architect of Iranian cultural consciousness; in narrative and poetic richness, the Shahnameh stands alongside the Iliad, the Odyssey, and Shakespeare's works."[153]

Arthur Christensen:

"Ferdowsi should be regarded, as Shakespeare is in England, as the preserver of national culture and language."[154]

A. J. Arberry:

"Ferdowsi's Shahnameh is equivalent to Shakespeare's great tragedies—constructing a nation's history, mythology, and collective psyche."[155]

4- Final Summary

Iranian Achievements Buried in the Dust of History

It is well known that Shakespeare's works have been translated into numerous languages and are taught in universities around the world[156]. However, this widespread availability stems primarily from the West's longstanding practice—dating back at least to the nineteenth century—of systematically collecting, preserving, and digitizing historical records[157]. As modern technology advanced, vast databases were established across Western countries, converting handwritten and printed archives into searchable digital collections.

In contrast, ancient Iranians recorded their most valuable knowledge by carving inscriptions into mountain rock faces or engraving clay tablets stored in specialized repositories[158]. Invading forces—particularly those seeking to eradicate the culture and identity of conquered regions—often destroyed

these *"information banks."* For example, the Arab conquest of Persia in the 7th century led to widespread cultural transformation, including the destruction or marginalization of key centers of pre-Islamic learning. European combatants, by comparison, rarely demolished each other's historical monuments except in exceptional circumstances. Consequently, a disproportionate share of documented evidence remains in Western hands.

Western Emphasis and the Case of Alexander the Great

Because global historical data is now largely curated by Western institutions, Western scholars tend to highlight European and Greek figures in their research. For example, Alexander is universally honored as *"the Great,"* yet I have never encountered Western academic critiques of his burning of Persepolis—in some Western accounts, the fire is even attributed to accident or lack of his awareness[159]. Likewise, most Western studies of ancient philosophy credit Greek philosophers with founding these disciplines, whereas I have documented—most notably in *"Systematic Distortion and Destruction of Ancient Iranian History"* and *"Four Intellectual Eras in Modern Civilization"*—that the foremost Greek thinkers were in fact pupils of an extraordinary Iranian sage named Ostāns[160]. We revisit these findings here for added emphasis.

Ostānes (Ostāns) in Classical Sources

Pliny the Elder (23–79 AD), the Roman historian, naturalist, and philosopher, praised Iranian gardens and urban design in his writings and also introduced his readers to Ostānes, a remarkable Iranian philosopher and scientist. Pliny writes:

"Ostānes, who held high rank at the court of Xerxes I, transmitted his writings to ancient Greece. So revered were these works that they were called 'divine writings."

He continues:

"The atomic theory—highly esteemed in ancient Greece—originated with Ostānes, who taught it to the leading Greek philosophers."

Orientalist Fuat Sezgin further argues that Ostānes was the spiritual successor to Zoroaster, the Iranian prophet, and is recognized as the founder of astronomy—systematically studying celestial motions and calendrical phenomena—and the author of *Twelve Chapters on the Sacred Stone*, also known simply as *The Book of Ostānes the Miraculous*. [Pliny & Sezgin][161]

Although these documents now reside in Western archives, they are neither taught in Western universities nor, to my knowledge, discussed in Western educational settings.

Contributions of Western Archaeologists

It is important to acknowledge the significant contributions of Western scholars to the decipherment of ancient Iranian inscriptions:

- **Sir Henry Rawlinson**[162] (1810–1895, Britain) – deciphered the Behistun Inscription
- **Georg Friedrich Grotefend**[163] (1775–1853, Germany) – initiated the decoding of Old Persian cuneiform
- **Carsten Niebuhr**[164] (1733–1815, Denmark) – produced accurate copies of the Persepolis inscriptions
- **Eugène Burnouf**[165] (1801–1852, France) – advanced cuneiform decipherment
- **Christian Lassen**[166] (1800–1876, Norway) – identified key cuneiform signs
- **Prof. Heydarī Koch**[167] – worked on Iranian inscriptions and authored *Az Zabān-e Dāriyush* (Es kündet Dareios der König: Vom Leben im persischen Großreich)

Concluding Thoughts

Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* and his role as the *"Savior of the Persian Language and Culture"* occupy a unique place in history. Although Shakespeare and Ferdowsi are both towering figures in world literature, Ferdowsi's impact extends beyond the literary realm into the revival of Iran's national and cultural identity during a period when that identity was at risk of erasure. From this perspective, Ferdowsi emerges not only as a poet but as the restorer of an ancient civilization's language, culture, and history. His *Shahnameh* stands as an enduring testament to the resilience of the Iranian identity.

End of Part Two (Final)

A Study by Faramarz Tabesh

Article Code in the Research Institute Archive:
hc j,s jh gknk-dö #C,ia jxfdrd hc cknäd , ldvhe tvn,sd , aös#dv_rslj n,l

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11. **Whispers Around Ferdowsi**
12. **Shakespeare and His Works**

References:

"Please note that references 1 through 121 pertain to the first part of the paper "

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123: Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is often considered one of the most important works in Western literature. It explores themes of death, revenge, and existential dilemmas.

124: *Macbeth* is a tragedy that examines the destructive effects of ambition and guilt.

125: *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's most famous works, focusing on young love and its tragic consequences.

126: Charles Dickens, a 19th-century British novelist, is known for his deep moral themes, and his works often contain characters inspired by Shakespearean archetypes.

127: Herman Melville, the American author of *Moby-Dick*, incorporated Shakespearean influences, especially in his exploration of obsession and fate.

128: Shakespeare's works have been translated into over 100 languages, making him one of the most widely read authors in the world.

129: *The Lion King* is a 1994 Disney animated film that takes inspiration from *Hamlet*, including themes of family, power, and revenge.

130: *Hamlet*'s character has been widely analyzed in the context of existentialism, philosophy, and modern psychology.

131: Ophelia, a tragic character from *Hamlet*, has inspired numerous works of art, including famous paintings by Pre-Raphaelite artists.

132. The Baconian Theory posits that Sir Francis Bacon was the real author behind Shakespeare's plays, arguing that his education and intellect better match the works' content.

133. Ben Jonson (1572–1637) was a playwright and poet who knew Shakespeare personally and praised him publicly, supporting his authorship.

134. The Rosicrucians were a secretive philosophical society from the early 1600s, advocating esoteric knowledge and mystical thought, often linked with alchemical and symbolic traditions.

135. Freemasons are members of a historic fraternal organization with roots in medieval stonemason guilds, associated with symbolic rituals and Enlightenment-era ideals.

136. Ignatius Donnelly (1831–1901) was an American writer and amateur historian known for proposing alternative historical theories, including authorship doubts about Shakespeare.

137. Manly P. Hall (1901–1990) was a Canadian-born mystic and author who explored occult and philosophical themes, especially in relation to art and literature.

138. David Ovason and Peter Dawkins are 20th–21st century writers who analyze symbolic and mystical elements in Shakespeare's plays from esoteric perspectives.

139. Ferdowsi's avoidance of Arabic vocabulary was a conscious cultural stance in response to the Arabization of Persian administrative and literary life after the 7th century.

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